

Letting the Story Play-Out

[Text - Psalm 139:1-12;
Matthew 13:24-30]

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A man driving down the highway is cut-off by another driver and goes absolutely ballistic - hitting his horn, swearing, shaking his fist, displaying his dominant digit...until suddenly he notices the flashing lights of a police car in his rearview mirror. He pulls over; the officer comes up to his vehicle and says, "Sir, I need to see your license and registration." Looking closely at them, and then the man, the officer says, "I sorry to have stopped you, mister Murdoch, but as I pulled-up behind you, you were pounding on your horn, cursing, and crudely gesturing to the person in front of you. The man asks, "So is that against the law?" "Not necessarily" the officer replies, "But when I noticed the bumper stickers on this car: *God Is My co-Pilot, and Give Peace a Chance*, I naturally assumed that you had stolen it. My mistake. Have a nice day!"

It can be dangerous for us to wear our piety on our shirt sleeves; or for that matter, on our car's bumper! It can also be dangerous to judge other people - either by the way they appear, or by how they may behave - or misbehave - at one particular moment. After all, what saintly person hasn't lost it from time to time? Perhaps, even swear like a sailor! And who am I to judge *sailors*? I'm sure there are many polite and clean-spoken men and women sailing the Seven Seas! The point is, we should be careful about perceiving - or presenting - ourselves as God's *favored* people, while looking at others as God's *flawed* people.

According to this morning's Scripture readings, only the Holy One knows us deeply and completely enough to accurately judge. As the Psalmist writes: "O Holy One, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar...and are acquainted with *all* my ways." This author realizes that our Ever-Present, Divine Source probably has a better understanding of the real "us" than we ourselves sometimes do. And even those parts of us that we think are hidden in shadow or darkness, are as clear as day to all-knowing Holy One. To paraphrase that Farmers' Insurance commercial: 'God *knows* a few things, because God's *seen* a few things!'

In our New Testament Reading, Jesus cautions us against trying to "weed-out" those people who don't measure-up to our standards; because by doing so, we can end-up causing more harm than good. It's hard to tell, just by looking, who are the "wheat" and who are the "weeds." I know that I myself can sometimes be a little of both. I may start-out to do something good and positive, and end-up making a real mess of things. Other times, I may not be attempting to do anything particularly helpful or beneficial for another, yet I end-up making a positive impact on that person's life. Fortunately for me and you, the Holy One who - in the beginning - creates order out of chaos, can still do the same in our lives today.

Perhaps that's one of the points of Jesus' parable: that in the end, the enemy who plants those weeds doesn't bring about the bad results which he intends. Not only do the weeds *not* cause the uprooting or destruction of the wheat, like the enemy desires; they actually became free bundles of fuel for the householder! So maybe, if you and I don't get all wrapped-up in judging, or excluding, or trying to rid ourselves of those "flawed" individuals around us, the Holy One may - in time - transform them, and us, for the better. After all, one of the primary reasons Jesus comes among us, is to bring hope and help, compassion and change to those whose lives are hopeless and hurting, lonely or lost - including our own! And Jesus also comes to rein us in, when we try to judge and exclude, control and condemn one another.

Instructing the servants to not try to separate the weeds from the wheat, the master of the household explains that if they do so, they'll probably end-up damaging the wheat as well. This phenomenon has been evidenced throughout Church History: people launching crusades against "the unfaithful," only to end-up doing extensive damage to the Household of Faith. By trying to weed-out the "unacceptable others" - be they pagans or prostitutes, lepers or heretics, Gays or Lesbians, minorities or Muslims - many self-proclaimed Christians end-up betraying the Gospel of Christ. The heart of Jesus' message and mission is about allowing the abundance of Divine love and grace to breaks-through the boundaries that we ourselves often try to erect and enforce. And when the Church forgets or neglects Christ's call - that we 'love our neighbor as we love ourselves' - we can drive-away the very people who most need the Church's caring embrace.

The Holy One who Jesus reveals is an overflowing fountain of compassion and kindness welcome and inclusion. Therefore, a *genuine* community of faith will strive to be the same. It will be a community of fallible and vulnerable human beings who recognize that there is some "bad" in the best of us, as well as some "good" in the worst of us. And while we strive, by the grace of God, to become better than we are, we will leave the judging of ourselves and others up to God: The One who sees and knows the entire story. Our highly capable "co-pilot" who consistently invites us to "Give Peace a Chance", and to give each other a break!